SOME

REMARKS

ON THE

TRAGEDY

OF

Hamlet Prince of *Denmark*,

Written by

Mr. *WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.*

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MVSEVM
BRITAN
NICVM

THERE *is hardly any Thing which has been more abus'd than the Art of Criticiſm; it has been turned to ſo many bad Purpoſes among us, that the very Word it ſelf has almoſt totally loſt its genuine and natural Signification; for People generally underſtand by Criticiſm, finding fault with a Work; and from thence, when we call a Man a Critick, we*

uſually mean, one diſpoſed to blame, and ſeldom to commend: Whereas in Truth, a real Critick, in the proper Senſe of that Word, is one whoſe conſtant Endeavour it is to ſet in the beſt Light all Beauties, and to touch upon Defects no more than is neceſſary; to point out how ſuch may be avoided for the future, and to ſettle, if poſſible, a right Taſte among thoſe of the Age in which he lives.

Ill-nature, and a Propenſity to ſet any Work in a ridiculous and falſe Light, are ſo far from being the Characteriſticks of a true Critick, that they are the certain Marks whereby we may know that a Man has not the true Spirit of Criticiſm in him.

There

There is a Weakneſs oppoſite to this, which indeed is better natur'd, but is, however, vicious; and that is, the being bigotted to an Author; inſomuch that Men of this Stamp, when they undertake to explain or comment upon any Writer, they will not allow him to have any Defects; nay, ſo far from that, they find out Beauties in him which can be ſo to none but themſelves, and give Turns to his Expreſſions, and lend him Thoughts which were never his Deſign, or never enter'd into his Brain.

Of all our Countrymen, Mr. Addiſon *is the beſt in Criticiſm, the moſt exempt from the Faults I mention; for his Papers upon* Milton's Paradiſe Loſt, *I look upon as the true Model for all Criticks to follow.*

follow. In thoſe we ſee the Beauties and Faults of that great Poet weigh'd in the moſt exact and impartial Scales.

Thoſe excellent Papers firſt gave me an Idea of publiſhing the following Sheets. Happy! if I can but any ways follow ſuch a Guide, though at ever ſo great a Diſtance; ſince I am well perſuaded, that by this Means I can never be totally in Error, tho' I may ſometimes deviate for want of proper Abilities!

Criticiſm in general, is what few of our Countrymen have ſucceeded in: In that reſpect, our Neighbours have got the better of us; altho' we can juſtly boaſt of the compleateſt Eſſay on that Subject that has been pub-

publiſh'd in any Language, in which almoſt every Line, and every Word, convey ſuch Images, and ſuch Beauties, as were never before found in ſo ſmall a Compaſs, and of whoſe Author it may properly be ſaid, in that reſpect,

He is himſelf that great Sublime he draws.

I would not have the Reader imagine, that I believe I have pointed out all the Excellencies in this Tragedy; I am not ſo vain as to think ſo. Beſides, theſe Papers are too few to contain them; and I have ſo little of Preſumption in me, that I did not think it reaſonable to put my Readers to a greater Expence, by enlarging on the Subject, until I find that they themſelves are not averſe to it.

This

This is all I have to ſay at preſent; whatever elſe is neceſſary to premiſe, will be found in the Introduction to the Remarks, to which I refer.

The Reader is deſired to correct the following *Errata*, *viz.* Page 1. line 7, for *Writers* read *Writer*. Page 9, line laſt, for *it* read *they*; and for *ſhews*, read *ſhew*. Page 53, line 13, dele *a*; and for *Impoſition*, read *Impoſitions*.

SOME

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OF

Hamlet Prince of *Denmark*.

I AM going to do what to ſome may appear extravagant, but by thoſe of a true Taſte in Works of Genius will be approv'd of. I intend to examine one of the Pieces of the greateſt Tragick Writers that ever liv'd, (except *Sophocles* and *Euripides*,) according to the Rules of Reaſon and Nature, without having any regard to

thoſe Rules eſtabliſhed by Arbitrary Dogmatiſing Criticks, only as they can be brought to bear that Teſt.

AMONG the many Parts of this great Poet's Character, ſo often given by ſome of our beſt Writers, I ſhall particularly dwell upon thoſe which they have the leaſt inſiſted on, which will, however, put every Thing he has produc'd in its true and proper Light.

HE had (beyond Diſpute) a moſt unbounded Genius, very little regulated by Art.

HIS particular Excellency conſiſts in the Variety and Singularity of his Characters, and in the conſtant Conformity of each Character to it ſelf from its very firſt ſetting out in the Play, quite to the End. And ſtill further, no Poet ever came up to him, in the Nobleneſs and Sublimity of Thought, ſo frequent in his Tragedies, and all expreſs'd with the moſt Energick Comprehenſiveneſs of Diction.

AND it muſt moreover be obſerved, as to his Characters, that although there are ſome entirely of his own Invention, and ſuch as none but ſo great a Genius could invent; yet he is ſo remarkably happy in following of Nature, that (if I may ſo expreſs it) he does it even in Characters which are not in Nature. To clear up this Paradox, my Meaning is, that if we can but once ſuppoſe ſuch Characters to exiſt, then we muſt allow they muſt think and act exactly as he has deſcribed them.

THIS is but a ſhort Sketch of the main Part of *Shakeſpeare*'s particular Excellencies; the others will be taken Notice of in the Progreſs of my Remarks. And if I am ſo happy as to point out ſome Beauties not yet diſcovered, or at leaſt not put in the Light they ought to be, I hope I ſhall deſerve my Reader's Thanks, who will thereby, I imagine, receive that Pleaſure which I have always done upon any new Diſcovery of this ſort, whether made by my own Labour, or by the Penetration of others: And as to thoſe Things which charm by a certain ſecret Force, and ſtrike us we know not how, or why; I believe it will not be diſagreeable, if I ſhew to every one the Reaſon why they are pleas'd, and by that Conſideration they will be capacitated to diſcover ſtill more and more Charms in the Works of this great Poet, and thereby increaſe their Pleaſure without End.

I DO not pretend, in Publiſhing theſe Remarks of mine, to arrogate any Superiority of Genius; but I think every one ſhould contritribute to the Improvement of ſome Branch or other of Literature in this Country of ours, and thus furniſh out his Share towards the Bettering of the Minds of his Countrymen, by affording ſome Honeſt Amuſements, which can entertain a Man, and help to refine his Taſte, and improve his Underſtanding, and no Ways at the Expence of his Honeſty and Virtue. In the Courſe of theſe Remarks, I ſhall make uſe of the Edition of this

Poet, given us by Mr. *Theobalds*, becauſe he is generally thought to have underſtood our Author beſt, and certainly deſerves the Applauſe of all his Countrymen for the great Pains he has been at to give us the beſt Edition of this Poet, which has yet appear'd. I would not have Mr. *Pope* offended at what I ſay, for I look upon him as the greateſt Genius in Poetry that has ever appear'd in *England:* But the Province of an Editor and a Commentator is quite foreign to that of a Poet. The former endeavours to give us an Author as he is; the latter, by the Correctneſs and Excellency of his own Genius, is often tempted to give us an Author as he thinks he ought to be.

BEFORE I proceed to the particular Parts of this Tragedy, I muſt premiſe, that the great Admirers of our Poet cannot be offended, if I point out ſome of his Imperfections, ſince they will find that they are very few in Proportion to his Beauties. Amongſt the former, we may reckon ſome *Anachroniſms*, and alſo the inordinate Length of Time ſuppoſed to be employ'd in ſeveral of his Pieces; add to all this, that the Plots of his Plays in general, are charged with ſome little Abſurdity or other. But then, how eaſily may we forgive this, when we reflect upon his many Excellencies! The Tragedy that is now coming under our Examination, is one of the beſt of his Pieces, and ſtrikes us with a certain Awe and Serioufneſs of Mind, far beyond thoſe Plays whoſe Whole Plot turns upon vehe-

vehement and uncontroulable Love, ſuch as are moſt of our modern Tragedies. Theſe certainly have not the great Effect that others have, which turn either upon Ambition, the Love of one's Country, or Paternal or Filial Tenderneſs. Accordingly we find, that few among the Ancients, and hardly any of our Author's Plays, are built upon the Paſſion of Love in a direct Manner; by which I mean, that they have not the mutual Attachment of a Lover and his Miſtreſs for their chief Baſis. Love will always make a great Figure in Tragedy, if only its chief Branches be made uſe of; as for inſtance, Jealouſy (as in *Othello*) or the beautiful Diſtreſs of Man and Wife (as in *Romeo* and *Juliet)* but never when the whole Play is founded upon two Lovers deſiring to poſſeſs each other: And one of the Reaſons for this ſeems to be, that this laſt Species of that Paſſion is more commonly met with than the former, and ſo conſequently ſtrikes us leſs. Add to this, that there may a Suſpicion ariſe, that the Paſſion of Love in a direct Manner may be more ſenſual than in thoſe Branches which I have mention'd; which Suſpicion is ſufficient to take from its Dignity, and leſſen our Veneration for it. Of all *Shakeſpeare*'s Tragedies, none can ſurpaſs this, as to the noble Paſſions which it naturally raiſes in us. That the Reader may ſee what our Poet had to work upon, I ſhall inſert the Plan of it as abridged from *Saxo-Grammaticus*'s *Daniſh* Hiſtory by Mr. *Theobalds*.

" The

" The Hiſtorian calls our Poets Hero *Am-*
" *lethus*, his Father *Horwendillus*, his Un-
" cle *Fengo*, and his Mother *Gerutha*. The
" old King in ſingle Combat, ſlew *Collerus*,
" King of *Norway*; *Fengo* makes away with
" his Brother *Horwendillus*, and marries his
" Widow *Gerutha*. *Amlethus*, to avoid be-
" ing ſuſpected by his Uncle of Deſigns,
" aſſumes a Form of utter Madneſs. A fine
" Woman is planted upon him, to try if he
" would yield to the Impreſſions of Love.
" *Fengo* contrives, that *Amlethus*, in order to
" ſound him, ſhould be cloſetted by his Mo-
" ther. A Man is conceal'd in the Ruſhes to
" overhear their Diſcourſe; whom *Amlethus*
" diſcovers and kills. When the Queen is
" frighted at this Behaviour of his; he tasks
" her about her criminal Courſe of Life, and
" inceſtuous Converſation with her former
" Husband's Murtherer; confeſſes his Mad-
" neſs is but counterfeited, to protect him-
" ſelf, and ſecure his Revenge for his Father;
" to which he injoins the Queen's Silence.
" *Fengo* ſends *Amlethus* to *Britain:* Two of
" the King's Servants attend him with Letters
" to the *Britiſh* King, ſtrictly preſſing the
" Death of *Amlethus*, who, in the Night
" Time, coming at their Commiſſion, over-
" reads it, forms a new One, and turns the
" Deſtruction deſigned towards himſelf on the
" Bearers of the Letters. *Amlethus* return-
" ing Home, by a Wile ſurprizes and kills his
" Uncle." I ſhall have Occaſion to remark

in

in the Sequel, that in one Particular he has follow'd the Plan ſo cloſely as to produce an Abſurdity in his Plot. And I muſt premiſe alſo this, that in my Examination of the whole Conduct of the Play, the Reader muſt not be ſurpriſed, if I cenſure any Part of it, although it be entirely in Conformity to the Plan the Author has choſen; becauſe it is eaſy to conceive, that a Poet's Judgment is particularly ſhewn in chuſing the proper Circumſtances, and rejecting the improper Ones of the Ground-work which he raiſes his Play upon. In general we are to take Notice, that as Hiſtory ran very low in his Days, moſt of his Plays are founded upon ſome old wretched Chronicler, or ſome empty *Italian* Noveliſt; but the more baſe and mean were his Materials, ſo much more ought we to admire His Skill, Who has been able to work up his Pieces to ſuch Sublimity from ſuch low Originals. Had he had the Advantages of many of his Succeſſors, ought not we to believe, that he would have made the greateſt Uſe of them? I ſhall not inſiſt upon the Merit of thoſe who firſt break through the thick Miſt of *Barbariſm* in Poetry, which was ſo ſtrong about the Time our Poet writ, becauſe this muſt be eaſily ſenſible to every Reader who has the leaſt Tincture of Letters; but thus much we muſt obſerve, that before his Time there were very few (if any) Dramatick Performances of any Tragick Writer, which deſerve to be remembred; ſo much were all the

the noble Originals of Antiquity buried in Oblivion. One would think that the Works of *Sophocles*, *Euripides*, *&c.* were Diſcoveries of the laſt Age only; and not that they had exiſted for ſo many Centuries. There is ſomething very aſtoniſhing in the general Ignorance and Dullneſs of Taſte, which for ſo long a Time over-ſpread the World, after it had been ſo glorioufly enlighten'd by *Athens* and *Rome*; eſpecially as ſo many of their excellent Maſter-pieces were ſtill remaining, which one would have thought ſhould have excited even the Brutes of thoſe barbarous Ages to have examined them, and form'd themſelves according to ſuch Models.

VOL. the 7th of Mr. *Theobald*'s *Shakeſpeare*. Page 225.

SCENE I.

Bernardo and *Franciſco*, two Centinels.

Bernardo. *Who's there?* &c.

NOTHING can be more conformable to Reaſon, than that the Beginning of all Dramatick Performances (and indeed of every other kind of Poeſie) ſhould be with the greateſt Simplicity, that ſo our Paſſions may be work'd upon by Degrees. This Rule is very happily obſerv'd in this Play; and it has this Advantage over many others, that it has Majeſty and Simplicity

city joined together. For this whole preparatory Diſcourſe to the Ghoſt's coming in, at the ſame Time that it is neceſſary towards laying open the Scheme of the Play, creates an Awe and Attention in the Spectators, ſuch as very well fits them to receive the Appearance of a Meſſenger from the other World, with all the Terror and Seriouſneſs neceſſary on the Occaſion. And ſurely the Poet has manag'd the Whole in ſuch a Manner, that it is all entirely Natural: And tho' moſt Men are well enough arm'd againſt all Belief of the Appearances of Ghoſts, yet they are forced, during the Repreſentation of this Piece, entirely to ſuſpend their moſt fixed Opinions, and believe that they do actually ſee a Phantom, and that the whole Plot of the Play is juſtly and naturally founded upon the Appearance of this Spectre.

Page 227.

Marcell.] HORATIO *ſays 'tis but our*
Phantaſie,
And will not let Belief take hold of Him,
Touching this dreaded Sight twice ſeen of Us;
Therefore I have intreated him along
With us to watch the Minutes of this Night;
That if again this Apparition come,
He may approve our Eyes, and ſpeak to it.
HORATIO, *Tuſh, Tuſh, 'twill not appear!*

THESE Speeches help greatly to deceive us; for it ſhews one of the principal Perſons

of the Drama to be as incredulous, in Relation to the Appearance of Phantoms, as we can be; but that he is at laſt convinc'd of his Error by the Help of his Eyes. For it is a Maxim entirely agreeable to Truth, if we conſider human Nature, that whatever is ſupernatural or improbable, is much more likely to gain Credit with us, if it be introduced as ſuch, and talk'd of as ſuch by the Perſons of the Drama, but at laſt prov'd to be true, tho' an extraordinary Thing, than if it were brought in as a Thing highly probable, and no one were made to boggle at the Belief of it. The Reaſon of this ſeems to be, that we can for once, upon a very great Occaſion, allow ſuch an Incident as this to have happen'd, if it be brought in as a Thing of great Rarity; but we can by no means ſo ſuſpend our Judgment and Knowledge, or deceive our Underſtandings, as to grant That to be common and uſual which we know to be entirely Supernatural and Improbable.

Page 227.

Enter the Ghoſt.

HERE it is certain, nothing could be better tim'd than the Entrance of this Spectre; for he comes in and convinces *Horatio*, to ſave *Marcellus* the Trouble of repeating the whole Story, which would have been tireſome to the Spectators, as theſe Gentlemen were obliged ſoon after to relate the Whole to Prince *Hamlet*.

HORATIO's Speeches to the Apparition are exceeding Natural, Aweful, and Great, and well suited to the Occasion and his own Character.

What art Thou, that usurpest this Time of Night,
Together with that fair and warlike Form,
In which the Majesty of buried Denmark
Did some Time march? By Heaven, I charge thee speak. Page 227.

The other is Page 230.

——————— *Stay Illusion!*
If thou hast any Sound, or Use of Voice,
Speak to me!
If there be any good Thing to be done,
That may to thee do Ease, and Grace to me,
Speak to me.
If thou art privy to thy Country's Fate,
Which, happily, Fore-knowing may avoid,
Oh speak!
Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy Life
Extorted Treasure in the Womb of Earth,
For which, they say, you Spirits oft' walk in Death,
Speak of it,—Stay and speak!—Stop it Marcellus.

His deſiring *Marcellus* to ſtop it, is alſo much in Nature, becauſe it ſhews a Perturbation of Mind, very much to be expected at ſuch an Incident. For he muſt know, being a Scholar, (as they term him) that Spirits could not be ſtopp'd as Corporeal Subſtances can.

But to return to Page 228.

Bernardo, *How now* Horatio! *you tremble and look pale*, &c.

This is entirely in Nature, for it cannot be ſuppoſed, that any Man, tho' never ſo much endu'd with Fortitude, could ſee ſo ſtrange a Sight, ſo ſhocking to human Nature, without ſome Commotion of his Frame, although the Bravery of his Mind makes him get the better of it.

Page 228.

Horatio, *Before my God, I might not this believe,*
Without the ſenſible and true Avouch
Of mine own Eyes.

This Speech ſtill helps on our Deception, for the Reaſons I have already given.

Page 228.

Horatio, *Such was the very Armour he had on*, &c.

I have

I HAVE heard many Perſons wonder why the Poet ſhould bring in this Ghoſt in complete Armour. It does, I own, at firſt ſeem hard to be accounted for; but I think theſe Reaſons may be given for it, *viz.* We are to conſider, that he could introduce him in theſe Dreſſes only; in his Regal Dreſs, in a Habit of Interment, in a common Habit, or in ſome Phantaſtick one of his own Invention. Now let us examine which was moſt likely to affect the Spectators with Paſſions proper to the Occaſion, and which could moſt probably furniſh out great Sentiments and fine Expreſſions.

THE Regal Habit has nothing uncommon in it, nor ſurpriſing; nor could it give riſe to any fine Images. The Habit of Interment was ſomething too horrible; for Terror, not Horror, is to be raiſed in the Spectators. The common Habit (or *Habit de Ville*, as the *French* call it) was by no Means proper for the Occaſion

IT remains then, that the Poet ſhould chuſe ſome Habit from his own Brain: But this certainly could not be proper, becauſe Invention in ſuch a Caſe, would be ſo much in Danger of falling into the Groteſque, that it was not to be hazarded.

NOW as to the Armour, it was very ſuitable to a King, who is deſcribed as a great Warrior, and is very particular, and conſequently affects the Spectators, without being phantaſtick. Beſides, if there were no other

Reaſon,

Reaſon, the fine Image which ariſes from thence, in theſe Lines, is Reaſon enough.

Such was the very Armour he had on,
When He th' ambitious Norway *combated,*
So frown'd He once, when in angry Parle,
He ſmote the ſleaded Polack *on the Ice.*
'Tis Strange!

THERE is a Stroke of Nature in *Horatio*'s breaking off, from the Deſcription of the King, and falling into the Exclamation. *'Tis Strange!* which is inimitably Beautiful.

Page 228.

Marcellus. *Good now ſit down,* &c.

THE whole Diſcourſe concerning the great Preparations making in *Denmark* is very Poetical, and neceſſary alſo towards the introducing of *Fortinbraſs* in this Play, whoſe Appearance gives Riſe to one Scene, which adds a Beauty to the Whole; I mean, That wherein *Hamlet* makes thoſe noble Reflections upon ſeeing That Prince's Army. Beſides, this Diſcourſe is neceſſary alſo to give the Ghoſt Time to appear again, in order to affect the Spectators ſtill more; and from this Converſation the Interlocutors draw one Reaſon, why the Spirit appears in Arms, which appears rational to the Audience. It gives alſo *Horatio* an Opportunity of addreſſing the Ghoſt in that beautiful Manner he does.

Page

Page 229.

Stay Illuſion ! &c.

THE Deſcription of the Preſages which happen'd to *Rome*, and the drawing a like Inference from this ſupernatural Appearance, is very nervous and Poetical.

Page 230, 231.

Bernardo. *It was about to ſpeak when the Cock crew*, &c.

THE Speeches in conſequence of this Obſervation are truly beautiful, and are properly Marks of a great Genius; as alſo theſe Lines which deſcribe the Morning, are in the true Spirit of Poetry.

Page 31.

But, look, the Morn, in Ruſſet Mantle clad,
Walks oe'r the Dew of yon high Eaſtern *Hill.*

AND as to *Shakeſpeare*'s complying with the vulgar Notions of Spirits amongſt the *Engliſh* at that Time, ſo far from being low, it adds a Grace and a *Naïveté* to the whole Paſſage, which one can much eaſier be ſenſible of than know how to make others ſo.

SCENE. *The Palace*, (*p.* 231.) And Sequel.

Enter the King, Queen, Hamlet, *&c.*

IT is very natural and apropos, that the King ſhould bring ſome plauſible Excuſe for marrying his Brother's Wife ſo ſoon after the Deceaſe of his Brother, which he does in his firſt Speech in this Scene: It would elſe have too ſoon revolted the Spectators againſt ſuch an unuſual Proceeding. All the Speeches of the King in this Scene to his Ambaſſadors *Cornelius* and *Voltimand*, and to *Laertes*, and to Prince *Hamlet*, are entirely Fawning, and full of Diſſimulation, and makes him well deſerve the Character which the Prince afterwards gives him, of *ſmiling, damn'd Villain, &c.* when he is informed of his Crime.

THE King's and Queen's Queſtions to *Hamlet* are very proper, to give the Audience a true Idea of the Filial Piety of the young Prince, and of his virtuous Character; for we are hereby informed of his fixed and ſtrong Grief for the Loſs of his Father: For it does not appear, that the Uſurpation of the Crown from him, ſits heavy on his Soul, at leaſt, it is not ſeen by any Part of his Behaviour.

HOW his Uncle came to be preferred to him, we are left entirely in the dark, but may ſuppoſe it to have been done in the ſame Manner, as ſeveral things of the like Nature have been effected, *viz.* by Corruption and Violence

and

and perhaps upon the Pretence of the Prince's being too young.

I CAN by no Means agree with Mr. *Theobalds*, (*p.* 235.) who thinks, that it is neceſſary to ſuppoſe a conſiderable Number of Years ſpent in this Tragedy; becauſe Prince *Hamlet* is ſaid to deſire to return to *Wittenberg* again, and is ſuppoſed to be juſt come from it; and that afterwards, the Grave-Digger lets us know that the Prince is Thirty Years old; my Reaſons are, that as *Wittenberg* was an Univerſity, and *Hamlet* is repreſented as a Prince of great Accompliſhments, it is no wonder that he ſhould like to ſpend his Time there, in going on in his Improvements, rather than to remain inactive at *Elſinoor*, or be immers'd in Sottiſhneſs, with which he ſeems to tax his Countrymen; as will appear in the Sequel. Beſides, he might well deſire to return there, when he found his Throne uſurped, and his Mother acting ſo abominable a Part. And as to the Term of going to School, *&c.* That does not at all imply literally a School for Boys, but is poetically uſed for Studying at any Age.

ANOTHER Reaſon may be given why there cannot be ſuppoſed to be a great Length of Time in this Play; which is this, That we ſee in the Firſt Act, Ambaſſadors diſpatch'd to old *Norway*, concerning his Nephew *Fortinbras*'s Army, which was then ready to march; and in the Fourth Act, we ſee this Prince at the Head of that Army, which immediately, up-

on the Embaſſy from the *Daniſh* King to his Uncle, we are naturally to ſuppoſe he leads to that other Enterprize which is mentioned in that Scene. Now it is no ways likely, that between the Embaſſy and the marching of an Army already aſſembled before that Embaſſy, there ſhould be a Number of Years. Theſe Reaſons and the whole Conduct of the Piece convince me, that this is one of *Shakeſpeare*'s Plays, in which the leaſt Time is employ'd; how much there is, I cannot pretend to ſay.

As to the *Prolepſis*, or in other Words, the mentioning the Univerſity of *Wittenberg*, long before its Eſtabliſhment, thus antedating its Time, I ſhall not juſtify *Shakeſpeare*; I think it is a fault in him; but I cannot be of Opinion, that it has any bad Effect in this Tragedy. *See Mr.* Theobald's *Note*, (p. 235.)

As to *Hamlet*'s Soliloquy, I ſhall ſet down the whole Paſſage, and ſhall ſubjoin the Remarks of a very eminent Author which are in the Spirit of true Criticiſm.

Oh that this too, too ſolid Fleſh would
melt,
Thaw, and reſolve it ſelf into a Dew!
Or that the Everlaſting had not fix'd
His Cannon 'gainſt Self-ſlaughter! Oh God!
Oh God!
How weary, ſtale, and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the Uſes of this World!
Fie on't! Oh fie! 'tis an unweeded Garden,
That

That grows to Seed; Things rank and groſs
in Nature,
Poſſeſs it merely. That it ſhould come to this,
But two Months dead! Nay, not ſo much,
not Two!
So Excellent a King, that was to this,
Hyperion *to a Satyr: So Loving to my Mo-*
ther,
That he would not let e'en the Winds of
Heav'n
Viſit her Face too roughly. Heav'n and Earth!
Muſt I remember? Why, ſhe would hang on
him,
As if Increaſe of Appetite had grown
By what it fed on; yet within a Month!
Let me not think. Frailty! Thy Name is
Woman.
A little Month; e'er yet thoſe Shoes were old,
With which ſhe follow'd my poor Father's
Body,
Like Niobe, *all Tears; Why ſhe, even ſhe,*
(Oh Heav'n, a Beaſt that wants Diſcourſe
of Reaſon,
Would have mourn'd longer) married with
mine Uncle,
My Father's Brother; but no more like my
Father,
Than I to Hercules. *Within a Month,*
E'er yet the Salt of moſt unrighteous Tears
Had left the flushing in her gaul'd Eyes,
She married. Oh! moſt wicked Speed, to
poſt
With ſuch Dexterity to inceſtuous Sheets!

It is not, nor it cannot come to Good.
But, break my Heart, for I muſt hold my Tongue.

" THE young Prince, (ſays this Author " in the *Tatler*,) was not yet acquainted with " all the Guilt of his Mother; but turns his " Thoughts on her ſudden Forgetfulneſs of his " Father, and the Indecency of her haſty Mar- " riage. The ſeveral Emotions of Mind, and " Breaks of Paſſion in this Speech, are admira- " ble. He has touch'd every Circumſtance " that aggravated the Fact, and ſeem'd capable " of hurrying the Thoughts of a Son into Di- " ſtraction. His Father's Tenderneſs for his " Mother, expreſs'd in ſo delicate a Particular; " his Mother's Fondneſs for his Father, no " leſs exquiſitely deſcribed; the great and a- " miable Figure of his dead Parent, drawn by " a true Filial Piety; his Diſdain of ſo un- " worthy a Succeſſor to his Bed: But above " all, the Shortneſs of the Time between his " Father's Death, and his Mother's Second " Marriage, brought together with ſo much " Diſorder, make up as noble a Part as any " in that celebrated Tragedy. The Circum- " ſtance of Time I never could enough ad- " mire. The Widow-hood had laſted two " Months. This is his firſt Reflection: But " as his Indignation riſes, he ſinks to ſcarce " two Months; afterwards into a Month; and " at laſt, into a *little* Month. But all this ſo " naturally, that the Reader accompanies him

" in

" in the Violence of his Paſſion, and finds the " Time leſſen inſenſibly, according to the dif- " ferent Workings of his Diſdain. I have " not mentioned the Inceſt of her Marriage, " which is ſo obvious a Provocation; but can't " forbear taking Notice, that when his Fury " is at its Height, he cries, *Frailty, thy* " *Name is Woman!* as Railing at the Sex in " general, rather than giving himſelf leave to " think his Mother worſe than Others."

Page 238.

Enter Horatio, Bernardo, *and* Marcellus, *to* Hamlet.

THE Greeting between *Hamlet*, *Horatio*, and *Marcellus*, is very eaſy, and expreſſes the benign Diſpoſition of the Prince, and firſt gives us an Intimation of his Friendſhip for *Horatio*.

Page 238.

We'll teach you to drink deep, e'er you depart.

THIS ſeems deſigned to reflect upon the ſottiſh Diſpoſition, then encouraged amongſt the *Danes* by the Uſurper, as will appear in the Sequel; and gives us one Reaſon why *Elſinoor* was diſagreeable to Prince *Hamlet*; and certainly, much confirms what I before ſaid, as to his going back to *Wittenberg*.

THE

Page 238.

THE Prince's Reflections on his Mother's haſty Marriage, are very natural, and ſhew That to be one of the principal Cauſes of the deep fix'd Concern ſo viſible in his Behaviour; and then they ſerve to introduce the Relation of the Appearance of his Father's Ghoſt.

Page 238, to the End of the Scene.

HAMLET receives the Account they give him with ſuch a Surprize as is very natural, and particularly his breaking off from the Conſequence of his Queſtion, viz. *Hold you the Watch to Night?* and ſaying *arm'd?* that is, returning to the main Queſtion, is exceedingly in Nature.

THEIR differing in the Account of the Time the Spectre ſtaid, throws an Air of Probability on the Whole, which is much eaſier felt than deſcribed.

THE Prince's Reſolution to ſpeak to the Phantom, let what will be the Conſequence, is entirely ſuitable to his Heroical Diſpoſition; and his Reflection upon his Father's Spirit appearing in Arms, is ſuch as one would naturally expect from him; and the Moral Sentence he ends his ſhort Speech with, ſuits his virtuous Temper, at the ſame Time that it has a good Effect upon the Audience, and anſwers the End of Tragedy.

Page 241, to the End of the Scene, in p. 246.

SCENE

SCENE in *Polonius*'s Houſe.

Enter Laertes *and* Ophelia, *and afterwards* Polonius.

It is evident by the whole Tenour of *Polonius*'s Behaviour in this Play, that he is intended to repreſent ſome Buffooniſh Stateſman, not too much fraught with Honeſty. Whether any particular Perſon's Character was herein aim'd at, I ſhall not determine, becauſe it is not to the Purpoſe; for whoever reads our Author's Plays, will find that in all of them, (even the moſt ſerious ones) he has ſome regard for the meaneſt Part of his Audience, and perhaps too, for that Taſte for low Jokes and Punns, which prevailed in his Time among the better Sort. This, I think, was more pardonable in him, when it was confined to Clowns, and ſuch like Perſons in his Plays; but is by no Means excuſable in a Man, ſuppoſed to be in ſuch a Station as *Polonius* is, Nay, granting that ſuch Miniſters of State were common, (which ſurely they are not) it would even then be a Fault in our Author to introduce them in ſuch Pieces as this; for every Thing that is natural is not to be made uſe of improperly: But when it is out of Nature, this certainly much aggravates the Poet's Miſtake. And, to ſpeak Truth, all Comick Circumſtances, all Things tending to raiſe a Laugh, are highly offenſive in Tragedies to good

good Judges; the Reaſon in my Opinion is evident, *viz.* that ſuch Things degrade the Majeſty and Dignity of Tragedy, and deſtroy the Effect of the Intention which the Spectators had in being preſent at ſuch Repreſentations; that is, to acquire that pleaſing Melancholy of Mind, which is caus'd by them, and that Satisfaction which ariſes from the Conſciouſneſs that we are mov'd as we ought to be, and that we conſequently have Sentiments ſuitable to the Dignity of our Nature. For theſe and many other Reaſons, too long to mention here, I muſt confeſs myſelf to be an Enemy alſo to all ludicrous Epilogues and Farcical Pieces, at the End of Tragedies; and muſt think them full as ridiculous as if we were to dreſs a Monarch in all his Royal Robes, and then put a Fool's Cap upon him.

But to come to the Scene now under Examination. It is certain, that except it be in playing upon the Word *Tender*, p. 244. (of which too he is ſenſible himſelf,) our old Stateſman behaves ſuitably to his Dignity, and acts fully up to his Paternal Character; ſo here we ſhall not tax him.

The Advice of *Laertes* to his Siſter contains the ſoundeſt Reaſoning, expreſs'd in the moſt nervous and poetical Manner, and is full of Beauties; particularly, I can never enough admire the Modeſty inculcated in theſe Lines:

The

The chariest Maid is prodigal enough,
If She unmask her Beauty to the Moon.

OPHELIA's modest Replies, the few Words she uses, and the virtuous Caution she gives her Brother, after his Advice to her, are inimitably charming. This I have observed in general in our Author's Plays, that almost all his young Women (who are designed as good Characters) are made to behave with a Modesty and Decency peculiar to those Times, and which are of such pleasing Simplicity as seem too ignorant and unmeaning in our well taught knowing Age; so much do we despise the virtuous Plainness of our Fore-fathers!

POLONIUS and *Laertes* Behaviour to each other, is exceeding natural; and I agree with Mr. *Theobalds*'s Emendation as to that Circumstance, (*p.* 243.) of *Polonius* Blessing his Son; but I can by no Means be of his Sentiment, that it was a Circumstance, which, if well managed by a Comick Actor, would raise a Laugh, (See his Note, *p.* 243.) for I am perswaded, that *Shakespeare* was too good a Judge of Nature, to design any Thing Comick or Buffoonish upon so solemn an Occasion, as that of a Son's taking leave of his Father in the most emphatical and serious Manner. And therefore, whatever Actor proceeds upon this Supposition (as I have seen some do in parallel Cases) does only shew his Ignorance and Presumption. This Assertion of mine will appear indisputable, if my Reader con-

ſiders well the whole Tenour of this Scene, with the grave and excellent Inſtructions which it contains, from *Polonius* to *Laertes*, and from both to *Ophelia*. It is impoſſible that any Buffoonry could be here blended, to make void and inſignificant ſo much good Senſe expreſſed in the true Beauties of Poetry. As to Prince *Hamlet*'s Love for *Ophelia*, I ſhall ſpeak to it in another Place.

CONCERNING the Deſign of this Scene, we ſhall find it is neceſſary towards the whole Plot of the Play, and is by no Means an Epiſode. As to *Laertes*'s Character, I ſhall ſay ſome thing of it elſe where.

Page 246.

SCENE. *The Platform before the Palace.*

Enter Hamlet, Horatio *and* Marcellus.

THE Beginning of this Scene is eaſy and natural. The King's taking his Rowſe, ſeems introduced to fill up a neceſſary Space of Time, and alſo perhaps to blacken ſtill more the Character of the Uſurper, who had revived a ſottiſh Cuſtom (as appears by the Prince's Remarks upon it) omitted by ſeveral of his Predeceſſors; for it would have been improper to have had the Ghoſt appear the Minute the Prince was come on to the Platform. Some Time was requiſite to prepare the Minds of the Spectators, that they might collect all their Faculties to behold this important

portant Scene, on which turns the whole Play, with due Attention and Seriouſneſs; although, indeed, I muſt think that the Prince's Speech would not be much worth preſerving, but for That Reaſon: for expreſſed and amended, according to the beſt that can be made of it, (as Mr. *Theobalds* has done it) it is but of very obſure Diction, and is much too long; for a very ſhort Moral is to be drawn from it.

Page 248.
Enter the Ghoſt.

We now are come to the ſublimeſt Scene in this whole Piece, a Scene worthy of the greateſt Attention; an Heroical Youth addreſſing the Shade of his departed Father, whom he tenderly loved, and who, we are told, was a Monarch of the greateſt Worth. Surely there cannot be imagin'd any Scene more capable of ſtirring up our nobleſt Paſſions. Let us but obſerve with how much Beauty and Art the Poet has managed it. This Spectre has been once ſpoken to by the Friend of our young Hero, and it muſt be confeſſed, that *Horatio*'s Speech to it is truly great and beautiful: But as the like Incident was again to happen; that is, as the Ghoſt was again to be addreſſed, and with this Addition, by the Hero of the Play, and Son to the King, whoſe Spirit appears; it was neceſſary, I ſay, upon theſe Accounts, that this Incident ſhould be treated in a ſublimer Manner than the Former.

Accordingly we may take Notice, that *Hamlet*'s Speech to his Father's Shade is as much ſuperior to that of *Horatio* upon the ſame Occaſion, as his is to any Thing of that kind that I have ever met with in any other Dramatick Poet.

HAMLET'S Invocation of the heavenly Miniſters, is extremely fine; and the begging their Protection upon the Appearance of a Sight ſo ſhocking to human Nature, is entirely conformable to the virtuous Character of this Prince, and gives an Air of Probability to the whole Scene. He accoſts the Ghoſt with great Intrepidity; and his whole Speech is ſo full of the Marks of his Filial Piety, that we may eaſily obſerve, that his Tenderneſs for his Father gets the better of all Sentiments of Terror which we could ſuppoſe to ariſe, even in the Breaſt of the moſt undaunted Perſon, upon the ſeeing and converſing with ſo ſtrange an Apparition.

HIS breaking from his Friends with that Vehemency of Paſſion in an Eagerneſs of Deſire to hear what his Father could ſay to him, is another Proof of his Filial Tenderneſs.

THE Reader of himſelf muſt eaſily ſee why the Spectre would not ſpeak to the Prince, but a-part from thoſe who were with him: For it was not a Secret of a Nature fit to be divulg'd. Their earneſt Intreaties, and almoſt Force which they uſe to keep him from going, are much in Nature; the Reaſons they give him, and the Reflections they make af-

ter

ter he is gone, are poetically expreſs'd, and very natural.

THE Ghoſt's Account of the baſe Murther committed on him, is expreſs'd in the ſtrongeſt and moſt nervous Diction that Poetry can make uſe of; and he ſpeaks with ſuch Gravity and Weight of Language as well ſuits his Condition. The Ideas he raiſes in the Audience by his ſhort Hint concerning the Secrets of his Priſon-Houſe, are ſuch as muſt cauſe that Terror which is the natural Effect of ſuch Appearances, and muſt occaſion ſuch Images as ſhould always accompany ſuch Incidents in Tragedy.

THE Ghoſt's bringing out the Account of his Murder by Degrees, and the Prince's Exclamations as he becomes farther acquainted with the Affair, are great Beauties in this Scene, becauſe it is all entirely conformable to Nature; that is, to thoſe Ideas by which we naturally conceive, how a Thing of this ſort would be managed and treated, were it really to happen.

WE are to obſerve further, that the King ſpurs on his Son to revenge his foul and unnatural Murder from theſe two Conſiderations chiefly, that he was ſent into the other World without having had Time to repent of his Sins, and without the neceſſary Sacraments, (according to the Church of *Rome*,) as Mr. *Theobalds*, (See his Note, *p.* 253.) has well explained it,) and that conſequently his Soul was to ſuffer, if not eternal Damnation, at leaſt a long Courſe of Penance in Purgatory; which

which aggravates the Circumſtances of his Brother's Barbarity. And, Secondly, That *Denmark* might not be the Scene of Uſurpation and Inceſt, and the Throne thus polluted and profaned. For theſe Reaſons he prompts the young Prince to Revenge; elſe it would have been more becoming the Character of ſuch a Prince as *Hamlet*'s Father is repreſented to have been, and more ſuitable to his preſent Condition, to have left his Brother to the Divine Puniſhment, and to a Poſſibility of Repentance for his baſe Crime, which by cutting him off, he muſt be deprived of.

HIS Caution to his Son concerning his Mother, is very fine, and ſhews great Delicacy in our Author; as has been obſerv'd by a great Writer of our Nation. The Ghoſt's Interrupting himſelf *(but ſoft, methinks, I ſcent the Morning Air, &c.)* has much Beauty in it, particularly, as it complys with the received Notions, that Spirits ſhun the Light, and continues the Attention of the Audience by ſo particular a Circumſtance.

THE Sequel of this Scene by no Means anſwers the Dignity of what we have hitherto been treating of. *Hamlet*'s Soliloquy, after the Ghoſt has diſappeared, is ſuch as it ſhould be. The Impatience of *Horatio, &c.* to know the Reſult of his Conference with the Phantom, and his putting them off from knowing it, with his Caution concerning his future Conduct, and his intreating them to be ſilent in Relation to this whole Affair; all this, I

ſay,

ſay, is natural and right; but his light and even ludicrous Expreſſions to them; his making them ſwear by his Sword, and ſhift their Ground, with the Ghoſt's Crying under the Stage, and *Hamlet*'s Reflection thereupon, are all Circumſtances certainly inferiour to the preceeding Part.

But as we ſhould be very cautious in finding Fault with Men of ſuch an exalted Genius as our Author certainly was, leſt we ſhould blame them when in reality the Fault lies in our own ſlow Conception, we ſhould well conſider what could have been our Author's View in ſuch a Conduct. I muſt confeſs, I have turn'd this Matter on every Side, and all that can be ſaid for it (as far as I am able to penetrate) is, that he makes the Prince put on this Levity of Behaviour, that the Gentlemen who were with him, might not imagine that the Ghoſt had reveal'd ſome Matter of great Conſequence to him, and that he might not therefore be ſuſpected of any deep Deſigns. This appears plauſible enough; but let it be as it will, the whole, I think, is too lightly managed, and ſuch a Deſign as I have mention'd might, in my Opinion, have been anſwered by ſome other Method more correſpondent to the Dignity and Majeſty of the preceeding Part of the Scene. I muſt obſerve once more, that the Prince's Soliloquy is exquiſitely beautiful.

I shall conclude what I have to ſay on this Scene, with obſerving, that I do not know

know any Tragedy, ancient or modern, in any Nation, where the Whole is made to turn ſo naturally and ſo juſtly upon ſuch a ſupernatural Appearance as this is; nor do I know of any Piece whatever, where a Spectre is introduced with ſo much Majeſty, ſuch an Air of Probability, and where ſuch an Apparition is manag'd with ſo much Dignity and Art; in ſhort, which ſo little revolts the Judgment and Belief of the Spectators. Nor have I ever met in all my Reading, with a Scene in any Tragedy, which creates ſo much Awe, and ſerious Attention as this does, and which raiſes ſuch a Multiplicity of the moſt exalted Sentiments. It is certain, our Author excell'd in this kind of Writing, as has been more than once obſerved by ſeveral Writers, and none ever before or ſince his Time, could ever bring Inhabitants of another World upon the Stage, without making them ridiculous or too horrible, and the Whole too improbable and too ſhocking to Men's Underſtandings.

ACT II.

Polonius and *Reynoldo*, and afterwards *Ophelia*.

POLONIUS's Diſcourſe to *Reynoldo* is of a good moral Tenour, and thus far it is uſeful to the Audience. His forgetting what he was ſaying, (*p.* 260.) as is uſual with old Men,

Men, is extremely natural, and much in Character for him.

OPHELIA's Deſcription of *Hamlet*'s Madneſs, does as much Honour to our Poet as any Paſſage in the whole Play, (*p.* 261, and 262.) It is excellently good in the *Pictoreſque* Part of Poetry, and renders the Thing almoſt preſent to us.

NOW I am come to mention *Hamlet*'s Madneſs, I muſt ſpeak my Opinion of our Poet's Conduct in this Particular. To conform to the Ground-work of his Plot, *Shakeſpeare* makes the young Prince feign himſelf mad. I cannot but think this to be injudicious; for ſo far from Securing himſelf from any Violence which he fear'd from the Uſurper, which was his Deſign in ſo doing, it ſeems to have been the moſt likely Way of getting himſelf confin'd, and conſequently, debarr'd from an Opportunity of Revenging his Father's Death, which now ſeem'd to be his only Aim; and accordingly it was the Occaſion of his being ſent away to *England*. WhichDeſign, had it taken effect upon his Life, he never could have revenged his Father's Murder. To ſpeak Truth, our Poet, by keeping too cloſe to the Ground-work of his Plot, has fallen into an Abſurdity; for there appears no Reaſon at all in Nature, why the young Prince did not put the Uſurper to Death as ſoon as poſſible, eſpecially as *Hamlet* is repreſented as a Youth ſo brave, and ſo careleſs of his own Life.

THE Caſe indeed is this: Had *Hamlet* gone naturally to work, as we could ſuppoſe ſuch a Prince to do in parallel Circumſtances, there would have been an End of our Play. The Poet therefore was obliged to delay his Hero's Revenge; but then he ſhould have contrived ſome good Reaſon for it.

HIS Beginning his Scenes of Madneſs by his Behaviour to *Ophelia*, was judicious, becauſe by this Means he might be thought to be mad for her, and not that his Brain was diſturb'd about State Affairs, which would have been dangerous.

Page 263.

Enter King, Queen,
Roſincrantz, Guildenſtern, *&c.*

THE King in this Scene, ſeems to be but half perſwaded that *Hamlet* is really mad; had he thoroughly believed it, it was to no Purpoſe to endeavour to ſound his Mind; and the ſhorteſt and beſt Way, and what, methinks, the King ought moſt to have wiſhed for, was to have had him confin'd; and this was an excellent Reaſon to give the People for ſo doing.

THE Queen ſeems to have no Deſign or Artifice in relation to her Son, but mere Affection; which, conſidering all Things, one would little expect from her.

THE Account of the Embaſſy to *Norway*, was neceſſary towards the Introduction of *Fortin-*

Fortinbraſs, in the Sequel, whoſe coming in at the Cloſe of the Play winds up all very naturally.

POLONIUS's Character, (*p.* 267, 268.) is admirably well kept up in that Scene, where he pretends to have diſcovered the Cauſe of the Prince's Madneſs, and would much deſerve Applauſe, were ſuch a Character allowable in ſuch a Piece as this.

HAMLET's Letter to *Ophelia*, which *Polonius* reads, is none of the beſt Parts of this Play, and is, I think, too Comick for this Piece. The whole Conduct of *Hamlet*'s Madneſs, is, in my Opinion, too ludicrous for his Character, and for the ſituation his Mind was then really in. I muſt confeſs, nothing is more difficult than to draw a real Madneſs well, much more a feign'd one; for here the Poet in *Hamlet*'s Caſe, was to paint ſuch a Species of Madneſs as ſhould not give cauſe of Suſpicion of the real Grief which had taken Poſſeſſion of the Prince's Mind. His Behaviour to thoſe two Courtiers, whom the Uſurper had ſent to dive into his Secret, is very natural and juſt, becauſe his chief Buſineſs was to baffle their Enquiries, as he does alſo in another Scene, (*p.* 304.) where his falling into a ſort of a Pun upon bringing in the Pipe, is a great Fault, for it is too low and mean for Tragedy. But our Author in this (as in all his Pieces) is glad of any Opportunity of falling in with the prevailing Humour of the Times, which

ran into falſe Wit, and a conſtant endeavour to produce affected Moral Sentences.

He was very capable of drawing *Hamlet* in Madneſs with much more Dignity, and without any Thing of the Comick; although it is difficult, as I ſaid, to deſcribe a feign'd Madneſs in a Tragedy, which is not to touch on the real Cauſe of Grief.

Page 277.

The Scene of the Players is conducive to the whole Scheme of this Tragedy, and is managed with great Beauty. We are to obſerve, that the Speeches ſpoken by the Prince, and one of the Players, are diſmal Bombaſt, and intended, no doubt, to ridicule ſome Tragedy of thoſe Days.

The Poet's ſtepping out of his Subject to laſh the Cuſtom of Plays being acted by the Children of the Chapel, is not allowable in Tragedy, which is never to be a Satire upon any modern particular *Foible* or Vice that prevails, but is to be ſevere upon Crimes and Immoralities of all Ages, and of all Countries.

Hamlet's Speech, (*p.* 281,) after his Converſation with the Players, is good; and by it we ſee, that the Poet himſelf ſeems ſenſible of the Fault in his Plot. But that avails not, unleſs he had found Means to help it, which certainly might have been.

The Prince's Deſign of confirming by the Play, the Truth of what the Ghoſt told him, is certainly well imagin'd; but as the coming

of theſe Players is ſuppoſed to be accidental, it could not be a Reaſon for his Delay.

ACT III.

Page 284.

How ſmart a Laſh, that Speech doth give my Conſcience, &c.

THE Poet here is greatly to be commended for his Conduct. As conſummate a Villain as this King of *Denmark* is repreſented to be, yet we find him ſtung with the deepeſt Remorſe, upon the leaſt Sentence that can any ways be ſuppoſed to relate to his Crime. How Inſtructive this is to the Audience, how much it anſwers the End of all publick Repreſentations by inculcating a good Moral, I leave to the Conſideration of every Reader.

HAMLET's Converſation with *Ophelia*, we may obſerve, is in the Stile of Madneſs; and it was proper that the Prince ſhould conceal his Deſign from every one, which had he converſed with his Miſtreſs in his natural Stile could not have been.

I AM perſwaded, that our Author was pleas'd to have an Opportunity of raiſing a Laugh now and then, which he does in ſeveral Paſſages of *Hamlet*'s ſatirical Reflections on Women; but I have the ſame Objections to this Part of the Prince's Madneſs, that I have before mentioned, *viz.* that it wants Dignity. *Ophelia*'s

phelia's melancholy Reflections upon *Hamlet*'s having loſt his Sovereignty of Reaſon, is natural and very beautiful. As to the King's ſending him to *England*, See Mr. *Theobald*'s Note. I purpoſely omit taking Notice of the famous Speech, *To be, or not to be, &c.* every *Engliſh* Reader knows its Beauties.

THE Prince's Directions to the Players are exceeding good, and are evidently brought in as Leſſons for the Players, who were *Shakeſpeare*'s Companions, and he thought this a very proper Occaſion to animadvert upon thoſe Faults which were diſagreeable to him. Whoever reads theſe Obſervations of his, if one may prove a Thing by a negative Argument, muſt believe *Shakeſpeare* to have been an excellent Actor himſelf; for we can hardly imagine him to have been guilty of the Miſtakes he is pointing out to his Brethren.

NOTWITHSTANDING all this, and that the Opportunity ſeems natural enough to introduce theſe Remarks, yet I cannot think them agreeable in ſuch a Piece as this; they are not ſuitable to the Dignity of the Whole, and would be better plac'd in a Comedy.

Page 292, Act 3d.

HAMLET'S Expreſſion of his Friendſhip for *Horatio*, has great Beauties; it is with Simplicity and Strength, and the Diction has all the Graces of Poetry. It was well imagin'd, that he ſhould let his Friend know the Secret of his Father's Murder, becauſe, thus his Requeſt to him,

him, to obſerve the King's Behaviour at the Play, is very naturally introduc'd as a prudent Deſire of the Prince's. The Friendſhip of *Eneas* for *Achates* in the *Eneid*, is found Fault with much for the ſame Reaſons that ſome Criticks might carp at this of *Hamlet*'s for *Horatio*, *viz.* that neither of them are found to perform any great Acts of Friendſhip to their reſpective Friends. But, I think, that the Friendſhip of *Hamlet* and *Horatio* is far ſuperior to that of *Eneas* and *Achates*, as appears in the laſt Scene, where *Horatio*'s Behaviour is exceeding Tender, and his Affection for the Prince likely to prove very uſeful to his Memory.

HAMLET'S whole Conduct, during the Play which is acted before the King, has, in my Opinion, too much Levity in it. His Madneſs is of too light a Kind, although I know he ſays, he muſt be idle; but among other Things, his Pun to *Polonius* is not tolerable. I might alſo juſtly find Fault with the want of Decency in his Diſcourſes to *Ophelia*, without being thought too ſevere. The Scene repreſented by the Players is in wretched Verſe. This we may, without incurring the Denomination of an ill-natur'd Critick, venture to pronounce, that in almoſt every Place where *Shakeſpeare* has attempted Rhime, either in the Body of his Plays, or at the Ends of Acts or Scenes, he falls far ſhort of the Beauty and Force of his Blank Verſe: One would think they were written by two different

ferent Perſons. I believe we may juſtly take Notice, that Rhime never arrived at its true Beauty, never came to its Perfection in *England*, until long ſince *Shakeſpeare's* Time.

THE King's riſing with ſuch Precipitation, and quitting the Play upon ſeeing the Reſemblance of his own foul Crime, is very much in Nature, and confirms the Penetration of our Author's Hero.

Page 302.

HAMLET's Pleaſantry upon his being certified that his Uncle is Guilty, is not a-propos in my Opinion. We are to take Notice that the Poet has mix'd a Vein of Humour in the Prince's Character, which is to be ſeen in many Places of this Play. What was his Reaſon for ſo doing, I cannot ſay, unleſs it was to follow his Favourite *Foible*, *viz.* that of raiſing a Laugh.

Page 306.

THE Prince's Reſolution upon his going to his Mother, is beautifully expreſs'd, and ſuitable to his Character.

Page 306, 307.

WHAT *Roſincrantz* ſays of the Importance of the King's Life, is expreſs'd by a very juſt Image.

Page 307.

THE King's ſeeming ſo very much touch'd with a Senſe of his Crime, is ſuppoſed to be owing to the Repreſentation he had been preſent at; but I do not well ſee how *Hamlet* is introduced ſo as to find him at Prayers. It

is

is not natural, that a King's Privacy ſhould be ſo intruded on, not even by any of his Family, eſpecially, that it ſhould be done without his perceiving it.

Page 309.

HAMLET's Speech upon ſeeing the King at Prayers, has always given me great Offence. There is ſomething ſo very Bloody in it, ſo inhuman, ſo unworthy of a Hero, that I wiſh our Poet had omitted it. To deſire to deſtroy a Man's Soul, to make him eternally miſerable, by cutting him off from all hopes of Repentance; this ſurely, in a Chriſtian Prince, is ſuch a Piece of Revenge, as no Tenderneſs for any Parent can juſtify. To put the Uſurper to Death, to deprive him of the Fruits of his vile Crime, and to reſcue the Throne of *Denmark* from Pollution, was highly requiſite: But there our young Prince's Deſires ſhould have ſtop'd, nor ſhould he have wiſhed to purſue the Criminal in the other World, but rather have hoped for his Converſion, before his putting him to Death; for even with his Repentance, there was at leaſt Purgatory for him to paſs through, as we find even in a virtuous Prince, the Father of *Hamlet*.

Page 310.

Enter the Queen and Polonius, *and afterwards* Hamlet.

WE are now come to a Scene, which I have always much admired. I cannot think

it poſſible, that ſuch an Incident could have been managed better, nor more conformably to Reaſon and Nature. The Prince, conſcious of his own good Intentions, and the Juſtneſs of the Cauſe he undertakes to plead, ſpeaks with that Force and Aſſurance which Virtue always gives; and yet manages his Expreſſions ſo as not to treat his Mother in a diſreſpectful Manner. What can be expreſſed with more Beauty and more Dignity, than the Difference between his Uncle and Father! The Contraſt in the Deſcription of them both, is exquiſitely fine: And his inforcing the Heinouſneſs of his Mother's Crime with ſo much Vehemence, and her guilty half Confeſſions of her Wickedneſs, and at laſt her thorough Remorſe, are all Strokes from the Hand of a great Maſter in the Imitation of Nature.

His being obliged to break off his Diſcourſe by the coming in of his Father's Ghoſt once more, adds a certain Weight and Gravity to this Scene, which works up in the Minds of the Audience all the Paſſions which do the greateſt Honour to human Nature. Add to this, the auguſt and ſolemn Manner with which the Prince addreſſes the Spectre after his Invocation of the Celeſtial Miniſters.

The Ghoſt's not being ſeen by the Queen, was very proper; for we could hardly ſuppoſe, that a Woman, and a guilty one eſpecially, could be able to bear ſo terrible a Sight without the Loſs of her Reaſon. Beſides that, I believe, the Poet had alſo ſome Eye to a

vulgar

vulgar Notion, that Spirits are only ſeen by thoſe with whom their Buſineſs is, let there be never ſo many Perſons in Company. This Compliance with theſe popular Fancies, ſtill gives an Air of Probability to the Whole. The Prince ſhews an extreme Tenderneſs for his Father in theſe Lines,

On Him! on Him! &c.
His Form and Cauſe conjoin'd, &c.

and really performs all the ſtricteſt Rules of Filial Piety thro' out the whole Play, both to Father and Mother; and particularly, to the Latter in this Scene, whilſt he endeavours to bring her to Repentance. In a Word, We have in this important Scene, our Indignation raiſed againſt a vile Murderer, our Compaſſion caus'd for the inhuman Death of a virtuous Prince; our Affection is heighten'd for the Hero of the Play; and, not to enter into more Particulars, we are moved in the ſtrongeſt Manner, by every Thing that can gain Acceſs to our Hearts.

HAMLET's killing *Polonius*, was in Conformity to the Plan *Shakeſpeare* built his Play upon; and the Prince behaves himſelf on that Occaſion, as one who ſeems to have his Thoughts bent on Things of more Importance. I wiſh the Poet had omitted *Hamlet*'s laſt Reflection on the Occaſion, *viz. This Counſellor*, &c. It has too much Levity in it; and his *tugging* him away into another

Room, is unbecoming the Gravity of the reſt of the Scene, and is a Circumſtance too much calculated to raiſe a Laugh, which it always does. We muſt obſerve, that *Polonius* is far from a good Character, and that his Death is abſolutely neceſſary towards the *Denoüement* of the whole Piece. And our Hero had not put him to Death, had not he thought it to have been the Uſurper hid behind the *Arras*; ſo that upon the Whole, this is no Blemiſh to his Character.

HAMLET's Behaviour to the King, &c. (Act *fourth*, *p* 320 and Sequel,) concerning *Polonius*'s Body, is too jocoſe and trivial.

Page 326.

Enter Fortinbraſs *with an Army.*

THIS is a Conduct in moſt of our Author's Tragedies, and in many other of our Tragedy Writers, that is quite unnatural and abſurd; I mean, introducing an Army on the Stage. Although our Imagination will bear a great Degree of Illuſion, yet we can never ſo far impoſe on our Knowledge, and our Senſes, as to imagine the Stage to contain an Army: Therefore in ſuch a Caſe, the Recital of it, or ſeeing the Commander, and an Officer or Two of it, is the beſt Method of conducting ſuch a Circumſtance. *Fortinbraſs*'s Troops are here brought in, I believe, to give Occaſion for his appearing in the laſt Scene, and alſo to give Riſe to *Hamlet*'s Reflections thereon.

thereon, (*p.* 327.) which tend to give ſome Reaſons for his deferring the Puniſhment of the Uſurper.

LAERTES's Character is a very odd one; it is not eaſy to ſay, whether it is good or bad; but his conſenting to the villainous Contrivance of the Uſurper's to murder *Hamlet*, (*p.* 342.) makes him much more a bad Man than a good one. For ſurely Revenge for ſuch an accidental Murder as was that of his Father's (which from the Queen, it is to be ſuppoſed he was acquainted with all the Circumſtances of) could never juſtify him in any treacherous Practices. It is a very nice Conduct in the Poet to make the Uſurper build his Scheme upon the generous unſuſpicious Temper of the Perſon he intends to murder, and thus to raiſe the Prince's Character by the Confeſſion of his Enemy, to make the Villain ten Times more odious from his own Mouth. The Contrivance of the Foil unbated (*i. e.* without a Button) is methinks too groſs a Deceit to go down even with a Man of the moſt unſuſpicious Nature.

THE Scenes of *Ophelia*'s Madneſs are to me very ſhocking, in ſo noble a Piece as this. I am not againſt her having been repreſented mad; but ſurely, it might have been done with leſs Levity and more Decency. Miſtakes are leſs tolerable from ſuch a Genius as *Shakeſpeare*'s, and eſpecially in the very Pieces which give us ſuch ſtrong Proofs of his exalted Capacity. Mr. *Warburton*'s Note (in Mr. *Theobalds*) on *Laertes*'s Rebellion, is very

very judicious, (as indeed are all thoſe of that Gentleman) only I cannot think *Laertes* (for the Reaſons I have given) a good Character.

ACT V.

THE Scene of the Grave-Diggers, (*p.* 344.) I know is much applauded, but in my humble Opinion, is very unbecoming ſuch a Piece as this, and is only pardonable as it gives Riſe to *Hamlet*'s fine moral Reflections upon the Infirmity of human Nature.

Page 354.

HAMLET'S Return to *Denmark* is not ill contriv'd; but I cannot think that his Stratagem is natural or eaſy, by which he brings that Deſtruction upon the Heads of his Enemies, which was to have fallen upon himſelf. It was poſſible, but not very probable; becauſe methinks, their Commiſſion was kept in a very negligent Manner, to be thus got from them without their knowing it. Their Puniſhment was juſt, becauſe they had devoted themſelves to the Service of the Uſurper in whatever he ſhould command, as appears in ſeveral Paſſages.

IT does not appear whether *Ophelia*'s Madneſs was chiefly for her Father's Death, or for the Loſs of *Hamlet*. It is not often that young Women run mad for the Loſs of their Fathers. It is more natural to ſuppoſe, that like *Chimene* in the *Cid*, her great Sorrow proceeded from her Father's being kill'd by the Man ſhe lov'd, and thereby making it indecent for her ever to marry him.

Page

Page 351.

IN *Hamlet*'s leaping into *Ophelia*'s Grave, (which is expreſs'd with great Energy and Force of Paſſion) we have the firſt real Proof of his Love for her, which during this whole Piece has been forced to ſubmit to Paſſions of greater Weight and Force, and here is ſuffered to break out chiefly, as it is neceſſary towards the Winding up of the Piece. It is but an Under-Paſſion in the Play, and ſeems to be introduced more to conform to the Plan our Poet built upon, than for any Thing elſe; tho' as the whole Play is managed, it conduces towards the Concluſion, as well as it diverſifies, and adds Beauties to the whole Piece.

Page 357.

THE Scene of the Fop *Oſrick* is certainly intended as a Satire upon the young Courtiers of thoſe Days, and is humouroufly expreſs'd, but is, I think, improper for Tragedy.

HAMLET's feeling, as it were, a Preſage in his own Breaſt, of the Misfortune impending from his accepting *Laertes*'s Challenge, is beautiful; and we are to note, that our Author in ſeveral of his Plays, has brought in the chief Perſonages as having a ſort of prophetick Idea of their Death; as in *Romeo* and *Juliet*. It was (I doubt not) the Opinion of the Age he lived in.

LAERTES's Death, and the Queen's, are truly poetical Juſtice, and very naturally brought about; although I do not conceive it

to

to be ſo eaſy to change Rapiers in a Scuffle, without knowing it at the Time.

THE Death of the Queen is particularly according to the ſtricteſt Rules of Juſtice, for ſhe loſes her Life by the Villany of the very Perſon, who had been the Cauſe of all her Crimes.

Page 364.

SINCE the Poet deferred ſo long the Uſurper's Death, we muſt own, that he has very naturally effected it, and ſtill added freſh Crimes to thoſe the Murderer had already committed.

UPON *Laertes*'s Repentance for contriving the Death of *Hamlet*, one cannot but feel ſome Sentiments of Pity for him; but who can ſee or read the Death of the young Prince without melting into Tears and Compaſſion? *Horatio*'s earneſt Deſire to die with the Prince, (*p.* 365, and Sequel,) thus not to ſurvive his Friend, gives a ſtronger Idea of his Friendſhip for *Hamlet* in the few Lines on that Occaſion, than many Actions or Expreſſions could poſſibly have done. And *Hamlet*'s begging him to *draw his Breath in this Harſh World* a little longer, to clear his Reputation and manifeſt his Innocence, is very ſuitable to his virtuous Character, and the honeſt Regard that all Men ſhould have not to be miſrepreſented to Poſterity; that they may not ſet a bad Example, when in reality they have ſet a good one; which is the only Motive that can, in Reaſon, recommend the Love of Fame and Glory.

When

Page 366.

When the Ambaſſadors from *England* ſay,

Where ſhall we have our Thanks?

And *Horatio* anſwers,

Not from his Mouth,
He never gave, &c.

I WONDER that Mr. *Theobalds* ſhould ſee any Difficulty in this; for it is but applying to the King what *Horatio* ſays, who knew the whole Affair, and then his Anſwer is juſt and true; and indeed, I think it cannot well be underſtood in any other Senſe from the whole Tenour of the Paſſage.

HORATIO's Deſire of having the Bodies carried to a Stage, *&c.* is very well imagined, and was the beſt way of ſatisfying the Requeſt of his deceaſed Friend. And he acts in this, and in all Points, ſuitably to the manly, honeſt Character under which he is drawn throughout the whole Piece. Beſides, it gives a ſort of Content to the Audience, that tho' their Favourite (which muſt be *Hamlet*) did not eſcape with Life, yet the greateſt amends will be made him, which can be in this World, *viz.* Juſtice done to his Memory.

FORTINBRASS comes in very naturally at the Cloſe of this Play, and lays a very juſt Claim to the Throne of *Denmark*, as he had the dying Voice of the Prince. He in few

Words gives a noble Character of *Hamlet*, and ſerves to carry off the deceaſed Hero from the Stage with the Honours due to his Birth and Merit.

I SHALL cloſe theſe Remarks with ſome general Obſervations, and ſhall avoid (as I have hitherto done) repeating any Thing which has been ſaid by others, at leaſt as much as I poſſibly can: Nor do I think it neceſſary to make an oſtentatious Shew of Learning, or to draw quaint Parallels between our Author and the great Tragick Writers of Antiquity; for in Truth, this is very little to the Purpoſe in reviewing *Shakeſpeare*'s Dramatick Works; ſince moſt Men are I believe convinced, that he is very little indebted to any of them; and a remarkable Inſtance of this is to be obſerved in his Tragedy of *Troïlus* and *Creſſida*, wherein it appears (as Mr. *Theobalds* has evidently demonſtrated it,) that he has choſen an old *Engliſh* Romance concerning the *Trojan* War, as a worthier Guide than even *Homer* himſelf. Nature was our great Poet's Miſtreſs; her alone has he followed as his Conductreſs; and therefore it has been with regard to her only, that I have conſidered this Tragedy. It is not to be denied, but that *Shakeſpeare*'s Dramatick Works are in general very much mix'd; his Gold is ſtrangely mingled with Droſs in moſt of his Pieces. He fell too much into the low Taſte of the Age he liv'd in, which delighted in miſerable Punns, low Wit, and affected ſententious Maxims; and what is moſt unpardonable

donable in him, he has interſperſed his nobleſt Productions with this Poorneſs of Thought. This I have ſhewn in my Remarks on this Play. Yet, notwithſtanding the Defects I have pointed out, it is, I think, beyond Diſpute, that there is much leſs of this in *Hamlet* than in any of his Plays; and that the Language in the Whole, is much more pure, and much more free from Obſcurity or Bombaſt, than any of our Author's Tragedies; for ſometimes *Shakeſpeare* may be juſtly tax'd with that Fault. And we may moreover take Notice, that the Conduct of this Piece is far from being bad; it is ſuperior in that reſpect (in my Opinion) to many of thoſe Performances in which the Rules are ſaid to be exactly kept to. The Subject, which is of the niceſt Kind, is managed with great Delicacy, much beyond that Piece wherein *Agamemnon*'s Death is revenged by his Son *Oreſtes*, ſo much admired by all the Lovers of Antiquity; for the Puniſhment of the Murderer alone by the Son of the murdered Perſon, is ſufficient; there is ſomething too ſhocking in a Mother's being put to Death by her Son, although ſhe be never ſo guilty. *Shakeſpeare*'s Management in this Particular, has been much admired by one of our greateſt Writers, who takes Notice of the beautiful Caution given by the Ghoſt to *Hamlet*,

But howſoever thou purſueſt this Act, &c.

THE making the Whole to turn upon the Appearance of a Spectre, is a great Improvement of the Plan he work'd upon; eſpecially as he has conducted it in ſo ſublime a Manner, and accompanied it with all the Circumſtances that could make it moſt perfect in its kind.

I HAVE obſerved in my Remarks, that the Poet has, with great Art, brought about the Puniſhment of the guilty Queen by the very Perſon who cauſed her Guilt, and this without Staining her Son's Hands with her Blood.

THERE is leſs Time employ'd in this Tragedy, as I obſerved elſe where, than in moſt of our Author's Pieces, and the Unity of Place is not much diſturbed. But here give me leave to ſay, that the Critick's Rules, in reſpect to theſe two Things, if they prove any Thing, prove too much; for if our Imagination will not bear a ſtrong Impoſition, ſurely no Play ought to be ſuppoſed to take more Time than is really employ'd in the Acting; nor ſhould there be any Change of Place in the leaſt. This ſhews the Abſurdity of ſuch Arbitrary Rules. For how would ſuch a Genius as *Shakeſpeare*'s have been cramped had he thus fettered himſelf! But there is (in Truth) no Neceſſity for it. No Rules are of any Service in Poetry, of any kind, unleſs they add Beauties, which conſiſt (in Tragedy) in an exact Conformity to Nature in the Conduct of the Characters, and in a ſublimity of Sentiments and nobleneſs of Diction. If theſe

two Things be well obſerved, tho' often at the Expence of Unity of Time and Place, ſuch Pieces will always pleaſe, and never ſuffer us to find out the little Defects in the Plot; nay it generally happens (at leaſt Experience has ſhewn it frequently) that thoſe Pieces wherein the fantaſtick Rules of Criticks have been kept ſtrictly to, have been generally flat and low. We are to conſider, that no Dramatick Piece can affect us but by the Deluſion of our Imagination; which, to taſte true and real Pleaſures at ſuch Repreſentations, muſt undergo a very great Impoſition, even ſuch as in Speculation ſeem very groſs, but which are nevertheleſs allowed of by the ſtricteſt Criticks. In the firſt Place, our Underſtandings are never ſhocked at hearing all Nations, on our Stage, ſpeak *Engliſh*; an Abſurdity one would think that ſhould immediately revolt us; but which is, however, abſolutely neceſſary in all Countries where Dramatick Performances are reſorted to, unleſs the Characters be always ſuppoſed to be of each reſpective Nation; as for inſtance, in all *Shakeſpeare*'s Hiſtorical Plays. I ſay, this never ſhocks us, nor do we find any Difficulty in believing the Stage to be *Rome*, (or *Denmark*, for inſtance, as in this Play;) or *Wilks* to be *Hamlet*, or *Booth* to be a Ghoſt, *&c.* Theſe Things, I repeat it, appear difficult in Speculation; but we find, that in Reality they do go down; and muſt neceſſarily do ſo, or elſe farewel all Dramatick Performances; for unleſs

leſs the Diſtreſs and Woes appear to be real (which they never can, if we do not believe we actually ſee the Things that are repreſented) it is impoſſible our Paſſions ſhould be moved. Let any one fairly judge, if theſe do not ſeem as great Impoſitions on our Reaſon, as the Change of Place, or the Length of Time, which are found fault with in our Poet. I confeſs there are Bounds ſet to this Deluſion of our Imaginations, (as there are to every Thing elſe in this World) for this Deluſion is never perform'd in direct Defiance of our Reaſon; on the contrary, our Reaſon helps on the Deceit; but ſhe will concur no farther in this Deluſion, than to a certain Point which ſhe will never paſs, and that is, the Eſſential Difference between Plays which deceive us by the Aſſiſtance of our Reaſon, and others which would impoſe upon our Imaginations in Deſpight of our Reaſon. It is evident by the Succeſs our Author's Pieces have always met with for ſo long a Courſe of Time; it is, I ſay, certain by this general Approbation, that his Pieces are of the former, not of the latter Sort. But to go to the Bottom of this Matter, would lead me beyond what I propoſe.

SINCE therefore it is certain, that the ſtrict Obſervance of the Critick's Rules might take away Beauties, but not always add any, why ſhould our Poet be ſo much blamed for giving a Looſe to his Fancy? The Sublimity of Sentiments in his Pieces, and that exalted Diction which is ſo peculiarly his own, and

in fine, all the Charms of his Poetry, far outweigh any little Abſurdity in his Plots, which no ways diſturb us in the Pleaſures we reap from the above-mention'd Excellencies. And the more I read him, the more I am convinced, that as he knew his own particular Talent well, he ſtudy'd more to work up great and moving Circumſtances to place his chief Characters in, ſo as to affect our Paſſions ſtrongly, he apply'd himſelf more to This than he did to the Means or Methods whereby he brought his Characters into thoſe Circumſtances. How far a general Vogue is the Teſt of the Merit of a Tragedy, has been often conſidered by eminent Writers, and is a Subject of too complicated a Nature to diſcuſs in theſe few Sheets. But I ſhall juſt hint two or three of my own Thoughts on that Head. Nature is the Baſis of all Tragick Performances, and no Play that is unnatural, *i. e.* wherein the Characters act inconſiſtently with themſelves, and in a Manner repugnant to our natural Ideas, can pleaſe at all. But a Play may be natural, and yet diſpleaſe one Sett of People out of Two, of which all Audiences are compoſed. If a Play be built upon low Subjects, but yet carried on conſiſtently, and has no Merit but Nature, it will pleaſe the Vulgar; by which I mean, all the unlearned and ill-educated, (as for Inſtance, *George Barnwell*, a Piece calculated for the Many) but it muſt be nauſeous to the Learned, and to thoſe of improved and exalted Underſtandings. So on the other Hand,

a Piece which turns upon Paſſions, which regard thoſe of high Station chiefly, cannot be ſo pleaſing to the Vulgar; for tho' all Men are born with the ſame Paſſions, yet Education very much exalts and refines them. Thus the Loves of Boors and Peaſants may delight the Populace, but thoſe of better Sort muſt have Delicacy in that Paſſion to ſee it repreſented with any tolerable Patience. The ſame is to be ſaid of Jealouſy and Revenge, which are indeed felt by all, but in Breaſts well educated are felt with ſharper Pangs, and are combated with more Vehemence, and from more and greater Motives; therefore ſuch People are fitter to judge, and more likely to be taken with noble and ſublime Repreſentations of ſuch Incidents. I need not obſerve, that the Vulgar cannot judge of the Hiſtorical Propriety of a great Character, This is obvious to every one; nor can they judge of the Paſſion of Ambition, as it has Power with Princes and great Men, becauſe not being verſed by Reading in parallel Stories, and not being in ſuch a Situation of Life, as to feel the Torments of ſuch Paſſions, they cannot certainly tell whether ſuch Things are repreſented with proper Circumſtances, and proper Conſequences drawn from them. And moreover, as all Men are by Nature more prone to ſome Paſſions than to others, This muſt cauſe Variety of Sentiments in relation to the ſame Piece. Beſides all this, we may be very certain that different Education, different Degrees

of Underſtanding, and of the Paſſions common to all Men, muſt cauſe a Variety of Sentiments concerning ſuch Repreſentations. To prove this, let us obſerve how the Taſtes of Nations differ in relation to theſe Things; ſo much, that one would be tempted ſometimes to think, that they did not all partake of the ſame Paſſions; but certainly they vary in the Degrees of them; therefore by a Parity of Reaſon we may juſtly conclude, that Difference of Education among thoſe of the ſame Nation muſt affect their Paſſions and Sentiments. The better ſort have (if one may ſo expreſs it) ſome acquired Paſſions which the lower ſort are ignorant of. Thus indeed it ſeems at firſt Sight; but on a nearer View they are found to be, as I ſaid, the ſame Paſſions augmented or refined, and turned upon other Objects. The different Manner in which one of *Corneille*'s or *Racine*'s Pieces would be received by an Audience of *Turks* or *Ruſſians*, and an Audience of *Frenchmen*, (ſuppoſing the former to underſtand the Language, and the latter to be free from any national Prejudices for the Authors) is a lively and ſtrong Emblem of the Force of Education and Cuſtom among Creatures, all caſt in the ſame Mould, and endued with the ſame Faculties and Paſſions with very little real Difference. Still farther, we may obſerve, that even good Acting will recommend ſome bad Pieces, as bad Acting will take away half the Merit of good Ones; and ſome National Subjects are pleaſing (as the *Albion Queens*

and *Earl* of *Eſſex*) to the Many, tho' they very little affect the Few. When I ſpeak of Plays, I deſire to be underſtood of Tragedies, in which I think the *Engliſh* excell; for I can mention very few of our Comedies with any Approbation; ſince in the Latter, neither the Morals of the Inhabitants of this Nation are regarded, or Nature followed. In ſhort, not to purſue a Subject, that would carry me great Lengths, I conclude from this, that a Piece which has no Merit in it but Nature, will pleaſe the Vulgar; whereas exalted Sentiments, and Purity and Nobleneſs of Diction, as well as Nature, are abſolutely requiſite to pleaſe thoſe of a true Taſte. And it is very poſſible, that a Play which turns upon ſome great Paſſion, ſeldom felt by the Vulgar, and wherein that Paſſion is treated with the greateſt Delicacy and Juſtneſs; I ſay, it is very poſſible that ſuch a Piece may pleaſe the Few, and diſpleaſe the Many. And as a Proof of the bad Taſte of the Multitude, we find in this Nation of ours, that a vile *Pantomime* Piece, full of Machinery, or a lewd blaſphemous Comedy, or wretched Farce, or an empty obſcure low Ballad Opera, (in all which, to the ſcandal of our Nation and Age, we ſurpaſs all the World) ſhall draw together crowded Audiences, when there is full Elbow-Room at a noble Piece of *Shakeſpeare*'s or *Rowe*'s.

Before I conclude, I muſt point out another Beauty in the Tragedy of *Hamlet*, beſides thoſe already

already mentioned, which does indeed ariſe from our Author's conforming to a Rule which he followed, (probably, without knowing it,) only becauſe it is agreeable to Nature; and this is, that there is not one Scene in this Play but what ſome way or other conduces towards the *Denoüement* of the Whole; and thus the Unity of Action is indiſputably kept up by every Thing tending to what we may call the main Deſign, and it all hangs by Conſequence ſo cloſe together, that no Scene can be omitted, without Prejudice to the Whole. Even *Laertes* going to *France*, and *Ophelia*'s Madneſs, however trivial they may ſeem (and how much ſoever I diſlike the Method of that laſt mentioned) are Incidents abſolutely neceſſary towards the concluding of all; as will appear to any one upon due Conſideration. This all holds good, notwithſtanding it is my Opinion, that ſeveral of the Scenes might have been altered by our Author for the better; but as they all ſtand, it is, as I ſaid, quite impoſſible to ſeparate them, without a viſible Prejudice to the Whole. I muſt add, that I am much in Doubt, whether Scenes of Proſe are allowable, according to Nature and Reaſon, in Tragedies which are compoſed chiefly of Blank Verſe; the Objection to them ſeems to be this, that as all Verſe is not really in Nature, but yet Blank Verſe is neceſſary in Tragedies, to ennoble the Diction, and by Cuſtom is become natural to us, Proſe mixed with it ſerves only, methinks, to diſcover the Effects

of Art, by the Contraſte between Verſe and Proſe. Add to all this, That it is not ſuitable to the Dignity of ſuch Performances.

In ſhort, Vice is puniſhed in this excellent Piece, and thereby the Moral Uſe of it is unqueſtionable. And if *Hamlet*'s Virtue is not rewarded as we could wiſh, Mr. *Addiſon*'s Maxim ought to ſatify us, which is this, "That "no Man is ſo thoroughly Virtuous as to "claim a Reward in Tragedy, or to have "Reaſon to repine at the Diſpenſations of "Providence; and it is beſides more Inſtruc-"tive to the Audience, becauſe it abates the "Inſolence of Human Nature, and teaches "us not to judge of Men's Merit by their "Succeſſes. And he proceeds farther, and "ſays, that though a virtuous Man may prove "unfortunate, yet a vicious Man cannot be "happy in a well wrought Tragedy." This laſt Rule is well obſerved here.

Another Reaſon why we ought to bear with more Patience the Sufferings of a virtuous Character, is the Reflection on the future Rewards prepared for ſuch, which is more ſuitable to the Moral Maxims eſtabliſhed in a Chriſtian Country. Beſides, had it pleaſed our Author to have ſpared *Hamlet*'s Life, we had been deprived of that pleaſing Senſation which always (as I have elſe where obſerved) accompanies a Conſciouſneſs that we are moved as we ought to be; which we moſt aſſuredly are, when we feel Compaſſion riſe in us for the young Prince's Death in the laſt

Scene.

Scene. I ſhall juſt touch upon one Thing more, and then I ſhall end theſe Reflections.

I AM very ſenſible that our Nation has long been cenſur'd for delighting in bloody Scenes on the Stage, and our Poets have been found fault with for complying with this vicious Taſte. I cannot but own, that there is a great deal of Juſtice in theſe Complaints; and muſt needs be of Opinion, that ſuch Sights ſhould never be exhibited but in order, viſibly, to conduce to the Beauty of the Piece. This is ſometimes ſo much the Caſe, that Action is often abſolutely neceſſary. And to come more particularly to the Subject now in hand, I deſire any unprejudiced Man, of any Nation whatever, (if ſuch can be found) who underſtands our Language, to conſider whether the Appearance of the Ghoſt, and the Deaths of the ſeveral principal Perſonages, (with whatever elſe may offend the Delicacy I mention) could poſſibly have that great, that noble Effect, by being told to the Audience, as they moſt undoubtedly have, by being brought on the Stage. If this Matter be well examined with all poſſible Candour, I am well perſwaded that it would be found in the End, that this Piece would, by the Method I ſpeak of, looſe half its Beauty.

THE *French*, (as has been often obſerv'd) by their Rules of Criticiſm, have voluntarily impoſed on themſelves an unneceſſary Slavery; and when little Genius's among them have written Tragedies with theſe Chains on, they have

have made moſt miſerable work of it, and given Plays entirely void of Spirit. Even the great Genius's in that Nation, ſuch as *Corneille* and *Racine*, and Mr. *De Voltaire* (which laſt being capacitated by having liv'd among us, and by learning our Language, to judge of the Defects and Merits of both Nations, is highly ſenſible of the Truth of what I now ſay, as appears in his Preface to his *Brutus*) even they have been forced to damp their Fire, and keep their Spirit from ſoaring in almoſt all their Pieces; and all this is owing to the falſe Notions of Decency, and a Refinement of Taſte among our Neighbours, which is getting now to ſuch a Height, that ſo far from being able to bear the Repreſentation of Tragical Actions, they are hardly able to bear any Subjects which turn upon the weightier Paſſions; ſuch as Ambition, Revenge, Jealouſy, *&c.* The Form of their Government, indeed, is of ſuch a Nature, that many Subjects cannot be treated as they ought, nor work'd up to that Height which they are here, and were formerly at *Athens*, *&c.* and Love, for that Reaſon among others is made to be the Baſis of almoſt all their Tragedies. Nay, the Education of the People under ſuch a Government, prevents their delighting in ſuch Performances as pleaſed an *Athenian* or a *Roman*, and now delight us *Britons*. Thus every Thing conduces to debaſe Tragedy among them, as every Thing here contributes to form good Tragick Writers; yet how few have we! And what is

very

very remarkable, each Nation takes Delight in that, which, in the Main, they the leaſt excel in, and are the leaſt fit for. The Audience in *England* is generally more crowded at a Comedy, and in *France* at a Tragedy; yet I will venture to affirm, (and I ſhall be ready upon Occaſion to ſupport my Aſſertion by good Reaſons) that no Comick Writer has ever equal'd *Moliere*, nor no Tragick Writer ever came up to *Shakeſpeare*, *Rowe*, and Mr. *Addiſon*. Beſides the many Reaſons I have already given in Relation to the *French*, I might add, that their Language is leſs fit for Tragedy, and the Servitude of their Rhime enervates the Force of the Diction. And as for Our Comedies, they are ſo full of Lewdneſs, Impiety and Immorality, and of ſuch complicated perplexed Plots, ſo ſtuffed with Compariſons and Similies, ſo repleniſhed with Endeavours at Wit and Smartneſs, that I cannot forbear ſaying, that whoever ſees or reads them for Improvement (I make ſome Exceptions in this Cenſure) will find a contrary Effect; and whatever Man of a True Taſte expects to ſee Nature, either in the Sentiments or Characters, will (in general) find himſelf very much miſtaken.

FINIS.